

BRIEF PRESENTED

BY

SAVE OUR TREES AND STREAMS SOCIETY

With reference to the Conservation  
and Development of Cooksville Creek.

Presented by the President,

Mr. Macklin L. Hancock.

May 31, 1974.

## INTRODUCTION

The Cooksville Creek, one of the community's original agricultural-era amenities of the central portion of Mississauga, is in trouble. With no doubt well-meaning intentions, the sectors of the Creek running through the parts of Mississauga that have been urbanized, or are undergoing construction, have been subjected to features intended to cope with urban runoff and protection requirements. These, however, have left the Creek in a sorry state of discontinuous, unsightly and ecologically ruinous condition. Recent attempts by one of the City's major developers to produce public open space have been laudable, but, with the City's policy on the Creek, a design alternative has been selected which for many, especially the membership of SAVE OUR TREES AND STREAMS, has turned out to be highly unsatisfactory. This is most in evidence in stretches between the Camilla Road extension (Ring Road) and Central Parkway. Above Central Parkway and Burnhamthorpe Road lies a section of the Creek and its flood plain that still reflects its old cultural character. This is threatened, however, by urban change and "stream improvement." At Burnhamthorpe Road are ominous earthworks crowded into the edge and bottom of the tributary of the Creek indicating the location of basements for town houses or apartments. Above Burnhamthorpe Road, pastoral creek beds and grassy slopes, with here and there a grove of trees, give no hint of impending change. We are most pleased that Council gives us the opportunity to present our views in such a way as to be of assistance to the Council in its examination of a much needed change of present policy.

We would like to put our suggestions to you in three parts:

1. The role of the stream in the community,
2. Recommendations
3. Some observations on the development of a Master Plan.

1. THE ROLE OF THE STREAM

A philosophy of the stream's usefulness to people is essential. In the days before European man came, the stream flowed down through lacustrine deposits over a shale bed, among dense stands of pine, hemlock and mixed hardwoods. Nearing the lake, this changed to areas of cedar, ash and willow. In the agricultural development of the Township of Toronto, the Creek and its tributaries were humanized, but they remained as servants to the people and the husbanded animals together with still very evident birds, fish, and small mammals, even deer. Cows would stand in the ponds and drink the sometimes muddy, but always refreshing water. Children, through the long summers, would explore the banks, fish, and plunge from tree roots or boulders into shoulder-deep pools. In the spring, would it be the farmers and their sons at sucker fishing time or the children rushing from school at noon hour, who would be immersed first? Winter would resound with shouts of ice hockey played on the frozen pools, often with a fire at the shore for visual warmth or for those who put their skates through shore ice. Even at the village centres at Cooksville or Howard's Corners the Creek was known and respected.

We all realize, with the farm and hamlet centres being replaced by residential areas, schools, parks, recreational centres and shopping, for perhaps more than 100,000 persons in the watershed of Cooksville Creek, that the Creek cannot remain the same and that it must have a new role, serving a quite different kind of community. It, of course, must continue to drain

o-called excessive runoff waters to Lake Ontario to replenish it with oxygen and non-necessary elements from the land for the biological cycles. It must, because of its position, be used to economically provide for storm water drainage. Viewed still as a servant of the people, it ought to be seen in its most imaginative way providing maximum enjoyment for the central part of our City. Our Mississauga, save for the Credit Valley has no magnificent landscape. The Creek and its valley did not seem to be of great scenic consequence to the early planners of our urban community. But, as the flattish lands of Cooksville became covered with hundreds of miles of streets, homes and apartment buildings, we look for special landscape features like the Creek, and find them being given no prominence. Canadians are being caught up in the post industrial drift and will seek, increasingly, opportunities and places in their communities for leisure-time enjoyment, both active and passive and continuing education. Energy shortages of the future will increase the emphasis on quality of life within pedestrian, bicycle and transit distance of one's dwelling and work, as in England and Europe. So we must look to those communities which have created quality environments around streams and small valleys and ponds in order to see what we could enjoy if we would take more pains to see the Creek as a future great asset, relieving the dreariness of an otherwise sprawling, featureless urban accretion. Close at hand, of course, we have that notable example at Stratford, Ontario, where a small creek, the Avon, flowed down through the farmlands and then into the

City, not far from the City core and through residential and industrial areas. At the turn of the century, the C.N.R. proposed running a rail line through and parallel to the stream valley, whose potential had not been recognized. Forward-thinking citizens could, however, visualize a Canadian Stratford with a not unattractive water feature like the English Stratford, and raised sufficient protest, notwithstanding that a muddy creek seemed an unlikely parallel to the much storied Avon of England. The City fathers reversed their stand, the railroad was built outside and the creek was dammed to create a substantial pond resembling, perhaps, more the larger farm ponds of southern Ontario and the mill ponds such as can be seen at Aberfoyle and Rockwood. Over the years, people got to like their big pond and aped the English with their swans and willows, even producing a fanciful pedestrian bridge. After the war, Tom Patterson saw the stream and Stratford as the place for a Canadian Shakesperian Festival and the City has now focused itself on the amenities of its pond, pedestrian walks and drives and on its grand respected Theatre, known the world over. It makes a convincing story on what to do with what, otherwise, would have been, today, only a runoff channel in Stratford, no doubt concrete lined according to the conventional wisdom of the fifties.

Visualize Ottawa without its Dow's Lake and the Rideau Canal moving through an old creek valley and down past the National Arts Centre, the Chateau Laurier and the

Parliament Buildings. What would Don Mills be without its Wilket Creek - a great lesson on what can be done!- or Guelph without the Speed?

In Boston the Fenway was once a simple, uninspiring stream that, fortunately, was foreseen as a future great amenity, so that now, over a 100 years later, its weirs have created a series of small ponds providing interesting landscape spaces connected by pedestrian corridors, penetrating many miles of the city giving opportunities for more gracious living in neighbourhoods that have gradually oriented toward the new amenity. Maturing trees, rush-lined banks and sylvan glades have recreated the places for wildlife right within the hustle and bustle of a busy community. An arboretum, major park and a parkway are now connected to it. Of course, in Europe, Hamburg's Alster, once a small creek, has been successively dammed to create ponds that have become the focus of the whole city, even though a great river, the Elbe, runs past the city and provides its North Sea port.

Our view in S.O.T.A.S. would be that we must see the Cooksville Creek's potential for serving Mississauga's urban man in a similar fashion. There are no two examples alike, and even though much has been done to eliminate the potential, lower down the watershed, we should be heartened by what has been done in San Antonio, where a one time creek had fallen to a 'low' of becoming only an open, partially-lined storm drain, penetrating through the City's core-side. Narrow, depressing and dirty it was; but it has now been so re-constructed over many years that the city is turning its face towards it and urban renewal is

affected by the fact that people want to walk its urban banks on attractive but inexpensive pedestrian routes, sit at the sidewalk cafes that sprout from the rear of the warehouses and apartments or other older residential buildings, and look from the windows of apartments and from a new hotel on to the narrow stream side with a new theatre and bridges. It would be worth visiting to see what can be brought back, even where it appears that degradation has become almost complete.

We urge the Council then to take heart from these easily studied examples. Clearly there are yet great opportunities for Cooksville Creek to become a linear focus for our community's growth and development as at times of old, with a flood plain and outdoor natural history museum, with its carved shale banks and balanced trees soaring above the edges. At other locations, the ponds or little lakes, reminiscent of the big pond created by Ernie Dillon north of what is now Queen Elizabeth Way, can provide change of pace and more people can be brought to their edges by linear and transverse pedestrian routes. Roads, instead of crossing suddenly, can be made more parkway-like in character and gain long, uninterrupted views of a revered and nurtured Cooksville Creek and Valley, no longer a backyard. Wherever there are suitable opportunities, there will be locations possible where neighbourhood or community cores can be designed so as to embrace both Creek and Valley more, allowing them to animate the places for people within the community. In short, the Creek should be considered as a planning

and design whole, giving shape and form to the neighbourhoods that adjoin it, and the communities through which it and even its minor tributaries and drainage channels flow. Not even one small gully connecting with the valley should be lost in this urban design consideration, for it is feature and relief that we are all looking for in what will, otherwise, become a faceless, sterile sprawl. Really, isn't this the genesis of community design, relating to the whole purpose of our urban fabric? Thought about in this way, the Creek will cease to be a series of unrelated, often ill-considered adjuncts, and become, instead, a vitalizing, ecologically successful continuum or corridor up to ten miles long.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The walk last Sunday was invaluable, giving a number of concerned people an opportunity to see and think, together, about a more suitable policy for Cooksville Creek's successful urbanization. The recommendations that follow stem from our observations during that walk and subsequent discussions within S.O.T.A.S.

### A. Undeveloped or largely undeveloped portions

Above Burnhamthorpe Road we could see the enormous still un-fettered opportunity. Below Burnhamthorpe Road all is not lost. Large tracts have only been marred, as yet, by the trunk sewer and bridges with their disruption of excavated shale. But there are soaring, majestic pines, natural forest cover and understory small trees such as Amelanchier, pin

cherry and witch hazel. These can easily be retained, and in S.O.T.A.S. we say must be retained.

The flood plain need not be tampered with as it will provide, on into the future, a large open space covered with the kaleidoscope of natural cover and wild flowers. As in the past, it will be nourished, occasionally, by flood waters, as the nature of its character depends on these conditions. Danger will be minimal, as shallower, slower-moving waters at flood time will give warning to children and animals, rather than a sudden slide on concrete into a roaring rush of water.

The area abutting the Creek immediately south of Burnhamthorpe Road has been despoiled by excavations which, in our view, should not have been permitted there. The Developer and Council should now renegotiate the relocation of these units on a new area to the north, permitting restoration of the site to its former contours of topography and vegetation and the land traded for parkland acquisition. It is easily possible for the Developer and Builder to consider another site. We recognize this raises problems over compensation, but submit that this can be cancelled out if a realistic view is taken over density and yield obtainable in the next phases of the Developer's activity.

We suggest that it is essential to establish Hazard Land Zones in this area as soon as possible. In

practice, this means not only establishing a valley rim line, but a buffer zone set back from the rim in which no development be permitted. Further, any developments that might influence this buffer strip and/or the valley itself must be judiciously planned so that the influence on table land is minimised.

The location of trunk sewers in the bed of streams appears to us to be the starting point of stream remodelling and the process which leads, eventually, to channelization. Apart from anything else, the reconstruction of the stream bed seldom meets required leakage standards, resulting in unnecessary loss of water from the stream. It must be remembered that the natural stream bed is a product of geophysical development over many thousands of years. Its destruction should not be taken lightly. A further point to be considered is that flow of ground water into the sewage system may, in certain circumstances, substantially increase the volume of liquid to be treated at the treatment plant, which, in turn, increases the cost of treatment.

B. Developed Portions

We are talking here of the stretch south of Central Parkway. This has been developed as a park in which the stream has been channelized, the flood plain filled to raise its level, trees filled around and wide asphalt walk or bike-way installed. The

intention of having park development is commended, but the failures indicate that the method was questionable and that another alternative should have been selected. What is needed now is to eliminate the failed portions and find a more natural and organic solution. The failure of the concrete channel beneath the bridge is particularly indicative that consideration be given to its removal. The over-straight stream section is unfortunate but could be alleviated by a dug pond, after investigation. In any event, the restriction of the section should be overcome by removing filled parts, returning to the original depressed flood plain. A weir may or may not be required near the bridge or lower down the stream. We would urge that the excessively groomed and "corrected" look be relieved. Trees can do much to soften this effect. The residual ash and willows have been filled around and scarred in most cases and it is probable that many will die. Groves of trees and understory shrubs judiciously selected and preferably not exotic, should be planted to soften the edges. Trees planted in juxtaposition to the bridges will do much to recreate naturalness and pleasing views. Fast growing trees, such as the Carolina poplar, can make up for the windrow of trees (ash) against the town houses on the east side which are being destroyed.

Below the lower Mississauga Valley Blvd. bridge, much could be done towards restoring the Creek by merely cleaning out the garbage and accumulated

debris. It is recommended that immediate steps be taken to do this.

We note that immediately below the bridge on the west bank, the land lying between a row of town houses and the Creek has been sodded only to the lot-line. The bank below this line requires stabilization, while more trees should be planted to replace existing trees whose vigour is now declining. Again, this is work that should be undertaken as soon as possible. Delay can only result in increasing the eventual cost of carrying out such work.

Lower down the Creek is channelized and in the vicinity of Little John Lane, there is an apartment building in the course of construction. The foundations of this building are, regrettably, near the Creek, while the concrete bed of the Creek, with its deposit of broken bottles and abandoned shopping carts, is an eye-sore. Some immediate house-cleaning is indicated here. As to the future, it is recommended that the City acquire the land on Little John Lane and establish a small park. Such a park should centre on a lake, the construction of which might be made to coincide with the remedial work on the bank of the Creek. At the same time, consideration should also be given to completely restoring this portion of the Creek to its natural state, i.e. the removal of the concrete channel.

3. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASTER PLAN

Our basic recommendation is that the City develop a new and comprehensive policy toward the conservation, environmental development and restoration of Cooksville Creek. To achieve the sound development of this policy, a process of thorough planning for the valley has to be entered into, centering on community values, both present and future. Involved here are both the development of a master plan together with implementation techniques for achievement.

The plan must first of all be preceded by designating the valley and other selected lands as Environmental Protection Areas. This would require all developers, or the Municipality, to put forward a documented environmental impact statement before any development that would threaten the valley's existing or planned character, is entered into.

It will be noted that I used the term 'Environmental Protection Areas' and not 'Hazardous Land Zone'. Environmental Protection Areas are a versatile type of zoning used to delineate any land which, for one reason or another, should be left undisturbed by development, e.g. ravines of ecological significance, whether there is a stream present or not; woodlots, low-lying land unsuitable for development and, perhaps, functioning as a refuge for wildlife. 'Hazard Land' would be one type of Environmental Protection Area. The Master Plan should be carefully laid out with respect to, and should be meshed with, the adjoining elements of housing or

cultural and social centres. This requires to be coupled with considerations regarding open spaces, pedestrian ways and transportation. Advantage can be taken of views of and proximity to the valley, of course, for higher density enjoyment of the space, but never to the detriment of the quality of the valley. The valley should impinge on the community and its elements, not the reverse.

This process requires time, of course, but remedial action and better planning can proceed at once without hindrance to the ongoing development.

The process requires, above all, teamwork in the preparation of plans with selected alternatives for decision by Mayor and Council and for the development of detailed policy statements giving community objectives. More thoroughgoing surveys of a complete bio-environmental and social nature have to be conducted to be added to physical planning and design surveys already undertaken, and which must be improved with more reliance being placed on air photo analysis techniques, which can be made to give a more pictorial presentation of the issues. Probably, a model should be built.

Until now, the policy of the City has been to solve the problems of urban runoff by more rapid removal of the water, naturally, with a great reliance on the role of the engineer. To be sure, we must always respect the engineer and his capabilities for mathematical specifics, but I speak here as a member of a much broader team of

of physical planning experts - embracing the community planner, the urban designer, landscape architect and architect, with specialised inputs from biological and water resource scientists. Such a team could not function effectively until it had been given policy direction by Council, with a specific but broad range of design parameters. Council already has a staff covering a number of the team inputs, but these will need to be augmented and guided by effective, sensitive, objective leadership and management. If these components are not available in-house, then outside experts should be engaged. Public support for the planning and design process must be ever-present and incorporated in the programme preparation and subsequent plan development stages.

It is evident to us that a landscape capability survey is vital to the proper development of a plan. This should include hydrology, plant, animal, soils and visual analysis. Flood lines, slopes, treed areas, rim on top of bank determination and set back from hazardous slopes and environmental protection areas must be recommendationed by a comprehensive team, (not by only one specialist).

Costs, of course, have to be estimated and determined but not measured against limited capital works criteria, only. They should include failure costs, operational and social costs, not readily seen.



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Mayor Dobkin and Members of Council,  
City of Mississauga.  
Mississauga. Ontario.

Dear Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have pleasure in attaching herewith a copy  
of the SOTAS report on Cooksville Creek, as  
presented by Mr. Hancock at Council.

Yours very truly,

*Valerie Andrew*

Secretary

c c Mr. E.H. Halliday✓

Mr. R. Edmunds

Mr. E. Bodnar

July 5th, 1974.